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SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS TELL DAS MARCIEL DEMOCRACY
IS THRIVING

REF: JAKARTA 2311

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: In an August 28 discussion with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scot Marciel, civil society leaders portrayed Indonesia as a strong democracy where NGOs have a vibrant voice. Noting the lack of accountability for past human rights abuses, they pointed to the investigation into the murder of well-known human rights activist Munir as a harbinger of hope. The activists also said strong U.S. support for human rights, rule of law and tolerance would be crucial as Indonesia solidified its grip on democracy. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On August 28, EAP DAS Marciel participated in a luncheon discussion with ten leaders from the human rights, religious, and labor communities. The DCM and Pol/C also participated. Usman Hamid, Coordinator of the human rights organization KONTRAS, led off the discussion by emphasizing that accountability for past human rights crimes would be an essential component of Indonesia's democratic development. Noting that no one had been brought to justice yet for past abuses in East Timor, Papua and Aceh, he said the Munir case (see refTel) offered a ray of hope that the legal process could hold human rights violators accountable (Note: Hamid, an attorney, has led the movement seeking justice in the Munir case). Hamid added that democracy was the only system under which Indonesians could live together, and argued that support for democracy meant tolerating for a time those who opposed it, including the supporters of sharia law.

Elections Are Making Officials Accountable

¶3. (SBU) Hana Satryio, Director of Gender and Women's Participation at the Asia Foundation, said officials were increasingly accountable because of direct elections. She added that the growth of civil society outside of the major urban areas had been especially dynamic. Hana pointed to the proliferation of stories on local corruption appearing regularly in newspapers across the country, sourcing investigations by local NGOs, as evidence of this.

¶4. (SBU) Rekson Silaban, Chairman of the Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union, one of Indonesia's three major unions, said the legal framework for forming unions in Indonesia was one of the best in the region. If anything, the legal environment was too conducive to forming unions, and by his estimation there were too many small ones.

Despite the abundance of unions, Silaban said the abuse of workers' rights still occurred from time to time, citing the recent case of labor activist Sarta bin Sarim, who served three months in jail on charges of "unpleasant behavior" (a Dutch era law) after organizing a small May 1 rally outside the factory near Jakarta where he worked (septel).

15. DAS Marciel asked the group what they believed to be Indonesia's biggest challenges moving forward. Hamid said that keeping democracy on track would be the foremost challenge, though he noted that Parliament was becoming powerful enough to deter any unlikely attempts by the military to seize power.

16. Responding to DAS Marciel's inquiry, Satryio said corruption was the biggest problem because it limited people's access to public services. She noted that while the problem was "humongous," the increasing frequency with which important officials were being prosecuted signaled progress on that front.

U.S. should support moderate groups

17. Gunawan Hidayat, Secretary General of Muhammadiyah Youth, said developing honest political leaders was the biggest challenge. According to Hidayat, Muhammadiyah was pushing political parties to run leaders who would promote good governance in the next elections. Hidayat said the U.S. should help moderate groups like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah to deliver moderate messages, but he demurred when asked how openly the U.S. should be doing so. He said law enforcement agencies and the courts were confronting radicalism in Indonesia, so support for rule of law would be a key way to fight extremism.

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18. Silaban complained that Indonesia was being singled out by the U.S. as a Muslim nation; Indonesia should not be seen solely through the prism of religion. Satryio argued that in reality, Indonesia sat on the margins of the Muslim world as Arab Muslim countries did not respect Indonesia's more liberal Islamic customs and mores. She questioned whether Indonesia should play a role as a leader in the Muslim world, or find other means to lead, such as in its capacity as a member of the UN Security Council.

19. Other participants included: Indira Fernida of KONTRAS, Hery Azumi, Chairman of the Indonesian Muslim Student Movement (an NU organization), Benny Susetyo, Executive Secretary for the Interfaith Movement of the Indonesian

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Catholic Bishops Conference, Poenky Indarti, Executive Secretary for the human rights group IMPARSIAL, and Ratna

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Batara Munti, Director of the Legal Aid Society for Women's Rights and Justice.

110. DAS Marciel approved this message.
HUME